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HOW THE ASSOCIATION CAME TO FOOCHOW

NATIONAL BOARD
YOUNG WOMENS CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES
600 LEXINGTON AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY
1914

How the Association Came to Foochow

Geographical

For those as yet unacquainted with the geography of the nation which holds the foremost place in the world today, it may be stated that Foochow is on the eastern coast of China midway between Shanghai and Hongkong. It is the capital of Fukien Province, a territory isolated from the other provinces by ranges of mountains to the northwest and south. Its coast line is rugged and broken with many islands.

Physical Conditions

Foochow is in the latitude of southern Florida. Its climate includes a beautiful fall, and early winter; a cold, rainy January and February; a short and delightful spring, and a long, hot summer. The thermometer is never low but the cold is damp and penetrating. During the hot season calling is undesirable from the standpoint of the secretary and of the Chinese. The natural scenery of Foochow is of the most beautiful in China, with semi-tropic vegetation and fields that yield three crops in one year. Foochow is divided into two distinct sections, the old city and the island. These are connected by a suburb reaching from the wall of the city to the bridge of "Ten Thousand Ages" which joins the island to the mainland. The city is walled. The suburb is one long street with shops on either hand, while the island is the home of the larger number of foreigners and several large mission schools.

Historical

It was during the visit of the national secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association that a request came from the young women at the Girls' Boarding School at Foochow to be organized into a society as the boys' school had been, and so in 1899 the first student branch in the Foochow Methodist Girls' Boarding School came into existence.

In 1907 the national secretary of the Young Women's Christian Association of China was invited to Foochow to conduct a series of evangelistic meetings in this Association. The meetings were concluded and an Association had been organized, a day's journey inland.

It was midnight and the national secretary was returning to Shanghai. Miss Bonafield, a member of the National Committee of China, and the secretary were seated on the ancient bunding along the river waiting for the usually belated steamer tender. The lapping of the water against the fern-grown masonry broke the quiet of the moonlit night. Within that hour was given to those women faith to believe that there might be held in China a conference for women students. And so it came to pass that through the efforts of Miss Bonafield the conference was planned. It was to be held at Kuliang, in the mountains, ten miles east of Foochow.

First Conference

As guests at the first conference there were four young women from the region of the Yangtse River, that great stream which is the pulse of the commercial life of Central China. It is of interest to know that their attendance was met with apprehension because of the fear that these young women might bring revolutionary ideas to the students of Foochow. Westerners feared the spread of radical national consciousness which even then

was making itself felt in China. The appeal made by these young women from Central China, by their Christ-like modesty and spiritual power, led one of the ladies who met them socially to inquire: "Where do you keep your dynamite?" This was in 1907. It was in 1911 that a group of earnest and overzealous young women of Foochow were the subject of anxious prayers and petitions in Shanghai! They had come with the avowed purpose of being *bomb throwers* in the revolutionary army! The authority of the church, the pleadings of friends, at first availed nothing. It was in the Shanghai city Association that the ringleaders of this group of enthusiasts met those who finally dissuaded them from their purpose and who aided the young women to return to Foochow and to their parents. A patriotism of so terribly earnest and mistaken form startles the West but it is none the less real.

Pioneering

It was in 1907, also, that a journey was taken by the secretary of China, in a sedan chair, for two hundred miles from Foochow inland, through the "Switzerland of China," Fukien Province. The purpose of the trip was to ascertain whether it was feasible to establish a traveling secretary for the province. The journey was made to such places as the city of Ngu Cheng, on its crumbling granite peninsula by the sea; to Hinghua, shut in by its tremendous city wall, a city even yet disturbed by the revolutionary wave which ran so high in this section of China; and on to Tehwa in the fastnesses of the mountains where the zealous members of this tiny student branch with their narrow horizon and limited resources have set an example to all the Association work in China. This Association has disbanded because the school is now discontinued. Their "world's penny" or "world's nickel," as



UP MOUNTAINS AND DOWN VALLEYS

we call it, was just double the amount decided upon by the National Committee as the apportionment for China. It was a group of girls from this school who obtained the first Helen Gould Bibles. Their strongest work was the preaching of the gospel in the villages around about. The hardships of this journey showed conclusively the un wisdom of asking for a traveling secretary for the province. It included not only the journey by chair but thousands of stone steps up mountains and down steep valleys, across uncertain bridges and through uninhabited mountain wastes. It also meant sleeping in inns and shooting dangerous rapids.

Conference

The days of the first student conference were full of unusual events. In the start the coolies who carried the chairs left blithely with the Chinese young women. The foreign chaperon of the party because of her extra weight was left without bearers, and she reached the mountains a long time after the delegates had arrived. The entertainment for the conference was provided by three Chinese ladies of means. They planned the meals, sent a man to the city ten miles away for fresh food, providing an afternoon luncheon of tea and boiled sweet potatoes. Several missionary friends opened their summer bungalows for the residence of the delegates.

The conference meetings were not unlike the conferences we know. There were Bible study, mission study and prayer hours. From the first, the Chinese young women were made responsible for as much of the service as they could carry. The Chinese young women conducted the quiet talks in the afternoon. A committee of delegates had sole responsibility for the music. Solos were sung by a Chinese young woman who is now studying

music in the United States. Recreation was planned for but frustrated many times by rains which in no way dampened the spirit of the conference.

The results formed a presage of what has occurred at each of the four conferences that have since been held. The students felt not only a deep interest in the winning of Chinese for Christ but their interest deepened in purposefulness for service. This association of Chinese young women, free to discuss their own problems and their opportunities for Christian service, is invaluable.

Miss Dobbins

In 1908 Miss Ethel Dobbins, who had for years been the efficient secretary at Illinois University, was sent to Foochow, but owing to unfortunate physical disability, Miss Dobbins, after a heroic battle to regain her strength, was forced to return to America. In this little time Miss Dobbins had formed helpful and hopeful relationships with missionaries and Chinese.

Student Life in Foochow

The Christian Girls' Schools are among the oldest in China. Three of them stand out as especially important. The Church Missionary Society Girls' School (English) is the largest girls' school in China. The American Methodist Girls' School is in two departments: The Girls' Boarding School and The Woman's College, each of which has a student branch of the Young Women's Christian Association. These two schools are on the island.

At Ponasang, where the secretaries of the Association reside, is the splendid Girls' School of the American Board of Missions (Congregational). Besides these there are other Christian schools, notable among which is the



ON THE ISLAND

C. M. S. GIRLS' SCHOOL

THE CITY BEYOND

high-class Girls' School of the Zenana Mission (English), The Girls' School for the Blind and a large school for girls of non-Christian parentage (English).

The Government Girls' Schools are largely within the old city. There are also many private schools. The Government has industrial, normal and high schools. Some of the students are boarders but most of them day pupils. Occasionally one school visits another, or is allowed to go in a body to attend some notable public gathering. For the most part the interests of the students remain either in their own homes or are centered about a few friends, possibly a teacher. The *esprit de corps* and school spirit are very little developed. The Association work, reaching into several schools, will be a basis upon which young women may be brought into fellowship, giving some of the helpful stimuli which makes for so much in Western college life. It will afford to students a conversational topic that will take them beyond the confines of their environment and text-books. The Chinese woman's mind when once awakened is apt to look below the surface to find the underlying purpose in that which interests them.

The women students in Foochow today may be characterized by two words—"freedom" and "restlessness." Foochow was the first city in the nation to accord publicly to girl students the privilege of walking upon the streets without molestation. The men of Foochow have conceded to its educated women this right, which is yet to come to the women in all the cities except the ports.

Delay

The hopes and promises raised by Miss Dobbins made the community more eager than ever for a secretary and repeated inquiries were sent to



OFF FOR A CALL THROUGH CROWDED STREETS

national headquarters as to her successor. It seemed impossible to secure one. Canton organized itself. The national committee was obliged to send a secretary there while Foochow waited. The young women of the Girls' School had grown to greater strength. The Woman's College of South China was organized and a branch was started in the preparatory department of this college. There are in the Foochow schools three young women who have been educated in America, who are teaching in the schools, and one physician with foreign training. All these have been repeatedly urged to address public gatherings and all are highly esteemed by the officials and gentry of the city.

Coincidence

The circumstances which led the China National Committee to send secretaries to Foochow show once again God's leading in the work in China. In March, 1913, Mr. Sherwood Eddy had been in China, holding a series of evangelistic meetings for men. He was urged to give one talk to women; over two thousand Chinese girls and women came to the meetings, and five hundred signed cards stating their desire to study the Bible. The National Committee heard the report of the meeting and knew that extra workers would be needed to conserve its results—they felt that they could no longer delay in sending secretaries to Foochow. A special meeting of the Committee was called and it was decided to offer to send Miss Helen Crane, of Bryn Mawr, who has just arrived in China (designated for Shanghai) to Foochow instead, and to send Miss Edith Wells, of Smith College, who had been for three years in North China, to study the situation and give aid in the immediate crisis. A letter to this effect was sent to Foochow.

On the same day that the National Committee met, a committee of women in Foochow representing the various nations met and voted to send an appeal to the National Committee for at least one Association secretary. The two letters crossed on the way, and on the receipt of a telegram from Foochow the two secretaries sailed for that city.

A Valuable Opportunity Lost

On their arrival at Foochow the two secretaries were given immediate opportunity to speak to students in the six largest government girls' schools and in four mission schools for girls. The Association work as conducted in other parts of China was explained and women were asked to enter Bible classes. A disappointingly small proportion of the women who had signed cards for Bible study really joined the Bible classes. Of five hundred men who were actually in Bible classes after the men's meeting, two hundred and fifty have been received into the Christian church. The difference in results can be explained by the fact that the Young Women's Christian Association came to the field after the crisis had been reached. The Young Men's Christian Association had been nine years on the field, had thorough preparation for their meetings and a real organized "follow-up plan." Thus this particular time of opportunity passed, but there remains yet *much* that may be accomplished.

Looking to Organization

An Advisory Committee of Chinese and foreign ladies has been appointed to act until organization can be formally effected. Miss Crane is engaged in the study of the Foochow language. Miss Wells, who speaks the Mandarin,

is teaching a class of Manchu women. There was in Foochow, as in all capital cities of China, a "banner" of Manchu clansmen; they were left utterly without support by the political upheaval and the Christian church has been their comforter. A church of two hundred and fifty Manchus has grown up since the revolution.

The secretaries are busy at least three afternoons a week calling either in schools or in Chinese homes. A call in China means the expenditure of five to ten times the amount of time that it takes in the United States, but it affords the only personal contact possible with many Chinese women.

Women's Activities

There is a group of married ladies, Chinese and foreigners, who call themselves "The Mutual Improvement Society"; to this select group the secretaries—Miss Wells and Miss Crane—have been admitted.

In South China, contrary to the custom of the North, women do very much of the heavy work out-of-doors. There is a distinctive class of women called "field women" whose headdress consists of three swords with huge earrings four inches across. There are women whose occupation is the rowing of boats on which passengers, singly or in groups, are transferred from point to point. There are women who take their full burden of work in heavy industry. They carry merchandise, while other women may be seen beating the gilded foil which is pounded into thin sheets for idol money, hammering wrought-iron, sawing bone for combs, in short, they are found to a limited number in almost every industry in which men are engaged. For these laboring women the Association will probably be unable to be of service for years to come. As modern conditions are introduced, the industries now carried on in the homes will be segregated in factories,



"THE BLIND RECEIVE THEIR SIGHT"

some will disappear and "woman's sphere" will be reshaped. It is apparent that with the enlisting of women of leisure and young women from the government schools there will come an indigenous movement for the study of evolving conditions for the uplift of their countrywomen.

Immediacy

Miss Wells' appointment to Foochow lasts only until her furlough in 1915, and for the city of more than a million at least two other secretaries must be sent immediately in order to conserve the work already begun. The crisis of the women of government schools is only one of the many that might be cited. Such tremendous opportunities are evidencing themselves from month to month in the republic of China. Those on the field are imperilled in their activity because of the tremendous pressure of the things they must leave undone. The two thousand students of last year will have become four thousand before the Association is fully ready to serve them. Chinese leaders must be found to do what they alone can accomplish. America must do its part in sending women to Foochow for this work which God has laid upon the Association in that city.

